

Office of Governor Mark Gordon



Early Childhood Education: Funding and Administration

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Overview

Access to Services

- Child Development Center funding
- Funding special education evaluation
- TANF/Title I
- Education Savings Accounts

Support for families and communities

Efficient state oversight

- Improved data integration
- Governance Task Force recommendations



Access to Services – CDC Funding (1 of 2)

- The state's primary early childhood investment is services for children with special needs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- In 2022 the state hosted a work group with leaders from child development centers (CDCs), school districts, WDE, and the Department of Health to study birth to five IDEA funding.
 - The work group found that for every dollar spent on special education in kindergarten, only 51 cents were being spent on children under five (on a per-child, per-year basis).



Access to Services – CDC Funding (2 of 2)

The work group made two recommendations:

- Develop a new formula funding for CDCs that does a better job of capturing the true cost of providing services; and
- Include a new methodology for counting the number of children served by the CDCs.

Further work is needed to develop a new formula, which could include tiers of funding based on child need.



Access to Services – Evaluations (1 of 2)

- A separate work group studied special education evaluation in Wyoming. This group also brought together leaders from the CDCs, school districts, WDE, and the Department of Health.
- One of the group's recommendations focused on centralized hiring for certain specialized evaluators and service providers.
 - Particularly in rural areas it can be hard to find the specialists needed – for both CDCs and school districts.
 - Taking a “shared services” approach might lead to better services and cost savings: a central entity would hire the specialists and then the school districts and CDCs would pay that entity for services.



Access to Services – Evaluations (2 of 2)

- Other states with rural populations have tried similar approaches with some success.
- The state could launch a pilot to test the idea in Wyoming.
 - Districts and CDCs already purchase specialized services, and any new approach should be sustained only if it represents an improvement on existing spending.
 - An investment of \$250,000 to \$500,000 should be enough to launch a pilot.



Access to Services – TANF and Title I Pre-k

- In an increasing number of school districts, publicly-funded pre-k is available thanks to TANF and Title I funds.
 - Better data about those offerings will be available soon (more on that later).
- These investments could be leveraged by the state to build its “mixed delivery” system in early childhood.
 - Further study could inform possible options.



Access to Services – Education Savings Accounts

- Wyoming is considering creating Education Savings Accounts (ESAs).
- In other states, early childhood is generally not an eligible ESA expenditure.
 - Arizona and Florida permit its use for certain pre-kindergarten children with special needs.
- Wyoming could be a pioneer by using ESAs to strengthen its early childhood system.
 - Further study would be needed to determine how to make ESAs most useful to families and providers.



Support For Families and Communities

- In a growing number of communities, formal collaborations are emerging that help families find the right services – and make the transition into kindergarten.
- The Early Childhood State Advisory Council has developed a toolkit for communities to support kindergarten transitions.
 - Best practices
 - Specific examples of Wyoming practice
- Communities would be interested in funding to help make it easier for families to access the system.



Efficient State Oversight – Data Integration

- Wyoming is working to integrate data from its different early childhood programs and services.
 - Interagency agreement among DFS, WDE, and Health
 - Answering questions from the Legislature a key priority of the system
- Wyoming is now integrating data from DFS and WDE
 - Health will follow when it has finished a system update
- Analysis of the integrated data is coming soon – if you are interested in a demonstration this fall, let us know!
- Planning to sustain the work after the current federal grant runs out
 - Estimated costs are \$700,000 per year



Efficient State Oversight – Governance

- The Bipartisan Policy Center found that Wyoming has the least efficient oversight of early childhood in the nation.
- In 2020, the state conducted a Governance Task Force. Its recommendations included moving all birth to five IDEA oversight to WDE.
 - A transition report followed in 2021
- This Committee was briefed on these findings in November 2021.
 - Changes at WDE
 - Changes among the CDCs – ask them how they feel

